



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

Telephone – Dial 311
www.houstontx.gov

April 9th, 2018

Thank you, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member members of the House Homeland Security Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today and speak to the ongoing recovery efforts from Hurricane Harvey.

First, we must level set around the scope of this disaster:

- In the City of Houston, over 135,000 single family homes were impacted.
- Over 209,000 apartment units were affected.

The total number of households runs up to 345,000.

As you have no doubt heard as we have been advocating for recovery dollars, more homes flooded in Houston during Hurricane Harvey than in New Orleans during Katrina or New York City during Superstorm Sandy. While we in government refer to such human suffering in terms like “unmet need,” I can tell you the needs of so many will require all of our efforts to help people overcome Harvey’s effects on their lives.

The immediate efforts were on rescuing people from harms way, and to that I want to thank again the men and women of the Houston Police Department, Fire Department, and Municipal employees who consistently went above and beyond to help their communities. But as we gave way from rescue to recovery, we have not lost that same sense of urgency.

When FEMA said it would be Christmas before we were able to remove debris, the city finished two weeks into October. That urgency was displayed by our Solid Waste Department employees, who worked 7 days a week teaming up with crews from other cities like San Antonio and Dallas along with private contractors. People cannot recover with debris in their yards, and the City of Houston worked overtime, again, with urgency.

The next item was planning for the recovery, and quite frankly that has meant changing the way we do business. I started off by naming Marvin Odum as our Chief Recovery Officer reporting directly to me and serving and speaking with my authority. Marvin’s Recovery Team has worked across city departments to break down silos and stress the urgency of recovery.

My charge to Marvin was “to make me uncomfortable,” and he has not shied away from bringing me tough decisions.

One of those decisions was to make significant changes to our Chapter 19 Flood Plain Ordinance, where we as a City will require all new construction to be at the 500-year flood plain, plus two feet. Homes in Houston flooded in Presidentially declared disasters in 2015, 2016, and in 2017. Suffering three 500-year floods in a row to me means there is a new normal, and government should catch up.

We now communicate, cooperate, and plan better with our partners at Harris County. I would be remiss not to mention my partner in this effort, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett. Our flooding czar, Steve Costello, works to make sure our city’s Public Works Department is in sync with Harris County’s Flood Control District to get the most protection out of every dollar spent.

I’m often asked by members of our delegation what more we could be doing, and I would like to take this opportunity to be specific on a request that we have. FEMA has had productive conversations with Marvin’s office on using volunteer hours to serve as our local match for FEMA Categories C – G. We both acknowledge those efforts and thank FEMA for working with us. Now is the time for FEMA to start this match program. Expanding the volunteer match will not only lower project cost for all levels of government – it would encourage further community involvement with the recovery, aligning with FEMA’s “Whole Community” approach. I would ask that as Members of Congress you join us in asking FEMA to begin. Know that local tax payers are thankful for what you can do to make this match happen.

Moving forward, there are two programs the City of Houston will be actively engaged in:

First, as we work with our partners at HUD and GLO to get the \$5 billion in Community Development Block Grants Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) dollars allocated to Texas into the communities affected, I know that my office will continue to work with local stakeholders and community partners to develop the best locally run programs that we can operate. Conversations and consultation are ongoing for this and I believe we will be able to report on progress on actions plans very soon.

Secondly, it is my hope that the State of Texas will consider joining Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Virginia, Georgia, and Colorado in helping to provide a local match for our Hazard Mitigation Grants Program (HMGP).

The State should use the ESF to fully participate (at 100%) of the local cost share for FEMA 404 Hazard Mitigation Grants. Under the declaration, FEMA will fund up to 75 percent of the costs for mitigation measures undertaken by the City.

By funding the cost share for HMGP projects, the state will be directly contributing to flood mitigation. This sends the right message and will protect homes and commercial property from the flood threat of these repeated storms across all areas of the state.

We cannot ask people to rebuild and deepen their roots in our community unless they know we, collectively as different levels of government, are working to mitigate the threat of future floods.

As Mayor of the largest city in Texas, I want to thank the people of Texas for their support during this unprecedented disaster. During Hurricane Harvey, approximately 27 trillion gallons of rain fell in Texas. But that was only the initial surge:

Police officers from Arlington and Fort Worth, solid waste crews from San Antonio and Dallas, and volunteers from faith based groups flooded Houston. We will never forget those who came to us in our time of need.

We have looked to our federal government for resources, and as the initial tranche of CDBG monies makes its way through HUD to the GLO, know that we are working with urgency to get resources to those who need it.